

France, for whom 'qui' and 'dont' were
nettles to be
rooted out wherever possible! Yet even
Proust's most
crowded and interminable periods preserve
a kind of
monstrous energy and variety, like those
motley pro-
cessions effaces that pass before one on a
moving staircase
on the Underground. Here is no Jacob's
Ladder reaching
to the stars and trodden by seraphic shapes;
yet it vibrates
with a vast complexity and power. And at
other moments
his style will suddenly drop its weight of
thought and
go gliding on its way with a melancholy
grace like that
Mariana of the South whom Marcel
watched in child-
hood by the Vivonne—'revenant de quelque
promenade
sur un chemin ou elle savait qu'il ne
passerait pas, oter
de ses mains resignees de longs gants d'une
grace inutile'.
Not as a gospel, then, nor yet as a novel
(*Madame*
Bovary, for example, seems to me a far more
perfect work
of art), but as a vast combination of
confessions, *pensees*,
and poetry, this book can be one of the most
moulding
experiences in life for those who read it. It
remains typi-
cally French in its combination of vivid
originality with
loyalty to tradition and intelligence, A
German would
have made it too metaphysical and
hysterical; an Italian,
too rhetorical; a Russian too mystical and
mad. Had it
been written in England, the law would
doubtless have
suppressed what it has, with typical English
illogicality,
winked at in translation. There have been

times since the
War when our interests have clashed with
those of our
neighbour; when we have resented what
seemed the short-
sighted injustice of her policy; but when we
come back
from the miseries of statecraft to the world
of letters and
consider what in literature our age has
produced to com-
pare with this work, then the most civilised
thing in
Christendom seems still, as for now three
centuries, the
genius of France.